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ABSTRACT

Psychology instruction through the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership at the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, is described, along with faculty development and teaching philosophy. Courses offered by the department are part of an integrated curriculum in the behavioral sciences, with the central focus being leadership development. The department's primary mission is academic in nature. Officers assigned to the department see themselves as much professional educators, as they do Army officers. Courses are designed and instructors are trained in accordance with the Systematic Design of Instruction procedures, which are based on clear statements of what the student is expected to do, on the student's having an active role in learning, and on the student's being evaluated against a standard and not against each other. To train Army officers to be effective college faculty, they undertake a 2-year graduate school experience, a faculty development workshop (FDW), and a continuing network of mentors. Graduate education is designed to establish subject matter expertise. The main activities of the FDW involve developing, revising, and practicing the instructional strategies used to help cadets achieve course goals. Typically, officers enter the department and are assigned to a committee and a specific sponsor. Each semester the faculty member progresses through different responsibilities and mentoring relationships. (SW)

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Teaching Psychology at the United States Military Academy

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TEACHING PSYCHOLOGY AT THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY

INTRODUCTION

On 2 January 1946 the Chief of Staff at the War Department, General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower, sent a letter to Major General Maxwell D. Taylor, then Superintendent of the United States Military Academy. The letter was a polite directive to include in the West Point curriculum "...a course in practical or applied psychology." Eisenhower's desire was to "awaken the majority of cadets to the necessity for handling human problems on a human basis and to much improve leadership and personnel handling in the Army at large." It is within this context and with this motive that on 29 June 1946, the Military Academy established the Department of Military Psychology and Leadership, the forerunner of today's Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership; and the study of psychology became a required part of a cadet's education.

USMA Curriculum

"As the national institution charged with the mission 'to educate, train and inspire the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate shall have the character, leadership, intellectual foundation and other attributes essential to progressive and continuing development throughout a career of exemplary service to the nation as an officer in the Regular Army' the Military Academy requires a program designed to stimulate intellectual development in an environment conducive to professional growth" (Concept for Intellectual Development, 1979). In many respects, the academic program at West Point coincides with the educational requirements at most leading colleges and universities, but it attempts to go beyond these to fulfill the special needs of the Army.

To cope with the wide range of challenges presently confronting military men and women and the uncertain needs of the future in a world characterized by rapid change, the Military Academy introduces each cadet to a variety of disciplines. Of the forty-four (44) courses a cadet takes, thirty-six (36) are required. Requirements include courses in engineering and the basic and applied sciences; preparing graduates to understand both the world's increasingly technological communities and modern weapon systems, and courses in the social and behaviorl sciences and humanities; which help lay the foundations for understanding human behavior, as well as divergent world

cultures and philosophies. Building upon this general education, cadet must select a concentration or major in one field/discipline to develop "the confidence that comes from fuller knowledge and to satisfy their intellectual curiosity" (Concept for Intellectual Development, 1979).

DEPARTMENT of BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES and LEADERSHIP

The Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership (D/BSL) is the newest of the thirteen current academic departments. It is the "logical product of the Academy's longstanding concern with the importance of leadership and the study of human behavior by leaders" and it fully supports the Academy's mission by providing a broad curriculum in the behavioral sciences, with the central focus being leadership (Prince and Cage, 1985).

Presently, cadets are required to take a course in General/Introductory Psychology, in their Fourth Class (Freshman) year, which provides a basic understanding of the scientific method and human behavior; and a course in Military Leadership, in their Second Class (Junior) year, which contributes to their leadership development by applying the theories and models of the behavioral sciences to leadership as it functions in the military environment. In addition to these two core courses, a cadet may select among thirty-five (35) electives and may even choose to take a field of study/concentration or major in the behavioral sciences. (There are four possible groupings: Human Factors Psychology, Individual Psychology, Leadership and Sociology. A major differs from a "concentration" in that it requires the cadet to take two more courses, as well as a terminal integrative symposium or colloqium). The ultimate goal of each course is to "enhance the cadet's potential for leadership and enlightened service" through learning both to understand and to change behavior (Prince and Cage, 1985).

D/BS&L's (as well as the entire Academy's) faculty is essentially military, consisting of thirty-five (35) uniformed officers and one civilian visiting professor. Six (eventually eight) of these officers make up a permanent tenured faculty: a Professor and Head of Department and five (eventually seven) Permanent Professors and Associate Professors. The remaining Assistant Professors and Instructors rotate every three years (i.e. one-third of the faculty changes each year). All permanent faculty have PhD's while the non-tenured faculty are predominately Master's level (though some also have doctorates).

Course Design

All course within D/BS&L are criterion referenced using the Systematic Design of Instruction procedures. They are based on the assumptions that students learn best and enjoy the process most when they: have a clear

statement of what they are expected to do; are given clear criteria for evaluation at the outset; are evaluated against a standard and not against each other; and play an active role in learning.

Faculty Development and Teaching Philosophy

In D/BSL teaching is job one! We see ourselves as professional educators. However, central to the department's (and the Academy's) educational program is the predominantly military faculty. These soldier - scholars act as much as career models as teachers, and classroom activities are as much a socialization process as a means of transmitting a particular subject matter. Officers assigned to D/BSL are intelligent and have excellent military records in their prior assignments (most are Captains when selected; combat arms; 28-34 years old). So as role models, they are well suited and well prepared. As college level classroom teachers, on the otherhand, they have great promise but are not yet well prepared.

Just prior to their arrival, officers receive two years of graduate training geared to the subjects they are going to teach. The specific courses taken are negotiated by D/BSL, the officer, and the particular graduate school, however, these may be the only psychology courses they have ever taken. Furthermore, they had very little if any experience as a college teacher. The permanent faculty's primary function, therefore is to take this promise -- this potential - and to quickly develop these successful Army officers into an effective college faculty. This process which began with their entry into graduate school and with possibly having a teaching assistantship while there (which is required when possible) accelerates dramatically upon arrival at West Point.

All new instructors initially teach one of the two core courses. Each of these courses is headed by a Permanent Associate Professor who acts as supervisor, and along with the returning members of the committee, as mentor to these newly assigned officers. In addition, each new faculty member is assigned to a specific committee member who acts as a sponsor and mentor for the first year. All new faculty arrive on 1 July and immediately participate in a six week Faculty Development Workshop (FDW), sponsored by their respective committee. The main purpose of this FDW is to prepare all involved for their teaching duties and although the workshop is conducted by the returning faculty, it is intended to be every bit as much a continuing developmental and enrichment experience for them, as it is for those participating for the first time. No departmental activity is given a higher priority or requires as much effort.

As educators we see ourselves as being in the business of planned change.

Our job is to help students to become different. To change their capabilities: what they know; how they used this knowledge; how they behave; and how they think. Accomplishing this requires planning and using what we as psychologists know about the learning process. Therefore, the principal workshop activities involve developing, revising and practicing the instructional strategies used to help cadets achieve the goals of that particular course.

Although not identical, each committee's workshop is very similiar in format. The first phase of the FDW is an intensive three weeks in which "old" committee members model various instructional strategies, "tried and tested" or proposed, to facilitate achievement of each lesson objective. The modeling is followed by an analysis of that strategy, and in turn, by a period of feedback and discusssion of alternative strategies. Central to the analysis is having the presenter explain "Why I used this particular preinstructional activity" and "Why I presented the lesson in this specific manner." This forces not only the presenter but all assembled, to think seriously about how to use what they know about the learning process to help people learn. This activity is enlightening to all involved. It permits the "older" faculty to consolidate, share and often to experiment with ideas born of their experiencs and, in most cases, opens a whole new way of thinking for the new instructors who have given little if any thought to these matters in the past. For example, we know that no learning will occur unless the students attend to what is being taught. So instructors are encouraged to think seriously about their preinstructional activities. Cadets enter the class from other classes; from mealtime formation; or sundry other experiences, pleasant and unpleasant and will face similiar circumstances when class ends. Instructors are taught to help the students shift their attention and to bring them mentally "into the classroom." To do so they need to catch their attention and capture their imagination. This is most often accomplished through startling facts, provocative problems to be solved and/or quotations. Furthermore, knowing that motivation, if not essential, certainly greatly enhances the learning process, we attempt to motivate the cadets by establishing the relevancy of the material to their lives and by piquing their curiosity. We want cadets to be saying to themselves, "This is going to be interesting;" and more importantly, "This next hour is going to be worthwhile." The two motivators we always attempt to arouse from the outset are the students' curiousity and the belief that the material to be learned is not only interesting but will be useful to them. Finally, during the preinstructional activities, we attempt to enhance the meaningfulness of the material by setting the context, where this particular lesson fits into what they have already learned and will learn in the future. This not only helps guide their selective attention, but aids both the students' encoding of the material into their memories and their eventual ability to recall the information when necessary.

The actual presentation of the subject matter is also the subject of continuous and serious consideration. All instructional strategies are

geared to small classes. Classes generally consist of twelve to eighteen (12-18) cadets and we take full advantage of that. Although desks are normally arranged in a "horse-shoe" so every cadet has a front row seat, this standard configuration is frequently modified either by having cadets seated in groups of three or four so they can engage in small group activities or in a circle so as to facilitate discussion among the students rather than having all communications teacher to student (and vice versa). "Teaching as talking" (Cross, 1986) is discouraged. Transmission of information is but one of the purposes of the academic program, throughout the Academy, as well as in D/BSL. Although there may be some academicians who view the classroom as consisting of two separate and unequal components: content and method; we believe this dichotomy is naive. By this logic the content, trival or complex, is always considered the "substance" of the lesson. It is what the student is supposed to learn. Extended to its logical conclusion, the content is unrelated to the method by which it is transmitted. The method be it imaginative or dull, is never more than a means of conveying the content. However, since officers must be able to make well considered decisions in an ever changing world, course work emphasizes the understanding and use of general principles rather than rote recall of information. Cadets, and especially officers, must be capable of recognizing and analyzing a problem, selecting an appropriate approach to solving it, evaluating alternative solutions and making decisions. Cadets, therefore, are required and must be helped to develop the higher level cognitive skills of application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Thus, in many instances, "the medium is the message." For many of the learning outcomes upon which our courses are based, the critical learning experiences are the methods or procedures through which the learning occurs. The presentation of basic knowledge level objectives is, in most instances, covered through readings and specifically designed worksheets that are completed prior to class. Rather than after class practice, "homework" is done in preparation for class. Instructors are taught to design their in-class teaching strategies around activities that provide students opportunities to practice the lesson objective(s), present their solutions to their fellow students, receive feedback, and then have opportunities for remediation. All this not only enables the students to learn the intellectual procedures for reaching a decision but provides an opportunity for rehearsal and enrichment which enhances the transfer and retention of the content.

The importance of the modelling, analysis, and feedback procedure that characterize the first phase of FDW cannot be overstated. The modelling is essential in that is shows the new instructors "how" to conduct a particular lesson. It also, of course, provides the presenter with an opportunity to practice and experiment. Of greater importance however, is the analysis and feedback. This provides the "why" and therefore allows the new instructor to go beyond mere duplication to creation and innovation. At the same time provides the presenter with the opportunity to make revisions and to improve. As phase one of the FDW progresses the new instructors are also given several opportunities to practice conducting classes, analyze them, and receive feedback.

Phase two of the FDW is essentially an out of the classroom experience that involves the instructors using what they have learned in the first phases to actually prepare lesson plans, select and develop instructional aids and to practice (usually informally). Again, the "older" faculty maintains a close mentor relationship, with sponsors being readily available to their sponsoree to act as a "sounding board," encourager, information source and advisor.

The mentor relationships that are formed is another key factor in transforming assigned personnel from Army Officer to college teacher. As officers' time in the department increases so do their repsonsibilities and the number of formal and informal mentor relationships. In a typical sequence, officers enter the department and are assigned to a committee and a specific sponsor. During the first semester, new instructors will act as an assistant area coordinator (each core course is divided into four or five "areas") and the area coordinator (often different from the sponsor) will show his/her assistant "the ropes." In the second semester, the assistant becomes the area coordinator and the "old" area coordinator acts as consultant. In the second or third year, most instructors will become the course director of an elective, and will teach only parttime in the core course, or will leave the committee altogether. At this point, a formal mentor relationship is established between the officer and the Permenant Associate Professor (or Professor) in charge of that elective, as well as with the officer who is presently teaching that course. This increasing network of senior faculty mentors is as essential as the original FDW in that it ensures all assigned officers constant and continuing tutelage in how to be, and what it means to be, a member of a college faculty. This makes the effective transformation from line officer to "P" (cadet slang for an officer who teaches at USMA) possible.

SUMMARY

In summary, courses offered by D/BSL are part of an integrated curriculum whose primary purpose is to produce dedicated, well prepared, and effective leaders for the United States Army. D/BSL's primary mission is academic in nature. Officers assigned to D/BSL see themselves as much as professional educators, as they do Army officers. Courses are desinged and instructors are trained in accordance with the Systematic Design of Instruction procedures. We clearly recognize that preparing cadets for leadership requires that they have intellectual abilities beyond the mere recall of isolated facts. Furthermore, we are aware that transforming Army officers into an effective college faculty requires they be more than merely subject matter experts. To meet both these challenges, intelligent and successful Army officers are provided with a carefully tailored two year graduate school experience, as well as a formalized FDW, and a continuing network of mentors. The purpose of the graduate education is to establish, as much as possible, their subject matter expertise. The goal of the FDW and continued

mentoring is to inculcate the idea that good teaching requires extensive planning, and to help each officer develop the required knowledge and skills to design and implement instructional strategies that enable cadets to sort out information, form associations among a variety of ideas, and then to apply these results to defining and solving problems. Finally, all instructors are keenly aware that they are training their replacements, and thus, the relevance of subject matter to the profession of Army Officer, is accentuated in the classroom without compromising intellectual or disciplinary rigor.

Bibilography

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